

Testimony of Theresa Staranchak, President
New Britain Federation of Paraprofessionals, AFT Local 2407

Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 1, 2012

S.B. 150 AN ACT CONCERNING FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE BENEFITS FOR
CERTAIN MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski, and members of the Labor Committee.

My name is Theresa Staranchak and I have chosen the career path of a paraprofessional. To me, making connections with students and helping them to be successful through academic and social interactions is something I really want to be doing. My 1:1 Spec. Ed. para position is a challenging, flexible and worthwhile position to be in. My role consists of assisting the teachers I work with, implementing my student's schedule and to also maintain a positive and focused environment for him. Ultimately, he will have less stress and a well balanced day.

I am also here today as President of my Local, 2407 from New Britain. We have a membership of over 250 paras who work hard, are dedicated, and most of all are resourceful individuals who are productive people in the district as well as the community. Our district relies on us and frankly we are the backbone of the educational system and an integral part of student's success.

This brings me to the reason why I feel strongly about bill SB 150. We cannot continue to live everyday with the stress and anxiety of whether or not we will have a job when we may be stricken with illness beyond our control. We as paraprofessionals are not eligible for FMLA under the present bill and this is not right. If we cannot take care of a family member or ourselves and feel confident that our jobs are not at stake, then how do we really stay healthy? Just this year alone 3 paras were denied FMLA because they do not meet the minimum hours which are 1250. These paras deserve more than this type of treatment. If the amount of hours were lowered then paras could take advantage of this benefit that every other employee has.

Peace of mind is a benefit that all paras could have if you will support this bill and consider passing it. I ask you here today to please give this very unique and committed group of individuals who presently are the only ones that are not benefiting by FMLA, the chance to benefit. Thank you for listening and for giving your time.